

ABBEY'S PARK THEATRE.

Commencing To-morrow (Monday), April 26,

DENMAN THOMPSON

—AS—

"JOSHUA WHITCOMB."

Managers can't understand it. Critics are at a loss to determine whether it is real life or the acme of dramatic art. The public go again and again, and evince renewed interest at each succeeding visit, without knowing why. Therefore we venture to explain.

In arranging the Comedy of "JOSHUA WHITCOMB" it has been the endeavor of the author to portray New-England life as it exists, and to avoid the many unreal and unnatural elements which have hitherto surrounded the traditional Yankee of the Stage.

In organizing the combination of actors who render the play, the manager's first aim has been to secure artists of acknowledged merit, and such as were not only able, but willing to confine themselves to the strict requirements of the parts assigned them, doing away with everything "stagey," and performing their parts according to the rules of every-day life.

We publish below the "SAN FRANCISCO ARGONAUT'S" explanation of our wonderful success, AND RESPECTFULLY ASK OF EACH PATRON A QUIET PERUSAL OF ITS CONTENTS.

FROM THE SAN FRANCISCO ARGONAUT, JUNE 12, 1879.

A MORAL DRAMA.

THE SECRET OF DENMAN THOMPSON'S SUCCESS.

Last Monday evening I drifted down from the California Theatre, and dropped curiously into the Bush Street Theatre, where a crowded audience, in orchestra, parquet, dress circle and overflowing gallery, were giving an enthusiastic and hearty and honest welcome back to old "Uncle Joshua Whitcomb," as personated by Denman Thompson. And as I stood there and saw the performance progress, and heard the laughter that bubbled right up and out at each quaint and homely saying, and noted the faces and the characters of the people present, I naturally began to cast about for an explanation of this wonderful phenomenon. Was it that the plain, unpretending sketch of "Uncle Joshua" overshadowed and overwhelmed the brilliant comedy at the California? Was it that the plain, unpretentious dressing, and acting and ensemble of the support of "Uncle Josh" were more attractive than the trains, and the diamonds and drawing-room surroundings of the handsome New-Yorker? None of these reasons, evidently. What then? A non-appreciation of the art of the gentleman, and a preference for the dialogue of the bucolic boor? No. A freak of the fickle public to desert one actor and demonstrate over another—an accident of an evening? Most certainly not, for the attendance and verdict of subsequent evenings were stronger and more pronounced than the first. What answer then? Is it sweet simplicity versus the shimmering sham of the drama, realism against romance, modesty preferred to morbidness, that wins? Yes, yes, without a doubt. The sketch of "Uncle Joshua Whitcomb" is a homely picture, but it is clean and healthful to look at. It teaches a moral lesson that a whole library of Sunday-school books could not expound. It preaches a sermon of practical religion that not one of the cloth could so thoroughly illustrate, and under this sign it conquers and captures us all. For who—no matter what his moral or religious belief—can fail, to sympathize with the sentiment that animates "Uncle Josh" when, in the great city, he comes face to face with a poverty, and a destitution, and a degree of degradation that he may have heard of, but had never before seen or known? How we duplicate his indignation when he encounters the drunken and worthless husband, the brutal stepfather; and how the average heart goes out with his when he promises the dying woman that she and her child shall be cared for "just as though they were his own," and, taking the body to his own homestead, buries it in a little grassy meadow where "Little Tot," when she "feels lonesome, and blue, and discouraged and tired, can go and sit down on a mother's grave and have a good cry, and feel better for it!" The little dialogues between "Bonny," the boot-black, and "Little Tot," both in the city and when they meet again on the farm, are instructive as well as interesting and replete with telling points for the young. In their homely but straightforward and pointed remarks and discussions there is more logic than is written in any moral law, and in Eastern towns where "Uncle Josh" is played people have brought their children for the express purpose of having them listen in all seriousness and appreciation to this little conversation between the two regarding the Sun-

day-school. And it is just this sort of thing—this religious and moral quality—that makes the play so successful. It gets right under the public vest at once, and creeps right into the popular heart in that sunny, silent and confiding way that the child seats himself on the visitor's knee. It wins a species of appreciation and applause that it is not difficult to place, because it is honest. The laughter comes broad, and hoarse and hearty from an unmistakable source, and the moistened eyes during the pathetic parts, and more particularly when the confiding old farmer hears, without having his faith shattered, that his boy has gone wrong, tell of tears direct from the well of a common feeling. It is the same material, and the same patronage and appreciation, that have made "Uncle Tom's Cabin" with its "Little Eva" and its pious "Uncle Tom," and its prayers and songs and sorrows and homelike scenes the marvel of dramatic managers, and a play that brings out the conservative element—people who seldom or never attend the average theatrical performance, but who go to an entertainment of this description very much as they would go to church or Sunday-school—for its moral atmosphere, and the instruction and the example to be obtained. These people are no friends of the romantic and more artistic school; they get no satisfaction from a plot that begins with deceptive love, develops into dishonest marriage, and ends in disagreeable divorce details, or a dreadful though deserved death. They are not keen in their appreciation of dialogue that dances continually on the verge of indecency, with situations that are questionable, with scenes that expose and shake in one's very face all the heartless details of unhappy, unwholesome and unhalloved life. They do not believe this morbid food is fit to eat. They do not think it a proper mental dish to set before the young. They do not recognize the exposure as an entertainment, and if by accident they should go they refuse to be fascinated by its dressing and drawing-room details, to smile at its broad suggestions, or to laugh at its questionable wit. But in a bit of realism, strong and sturdy in the right, they revel. They are uproarious in their mirth, keen in the appreciation of a joke, strong in sympathy. They live in a stage picture. They forget they are in a theatre. They sing in spirit the plaintive little songs where unembellished notes are better than any opera music that was ever composed, and they follow the commonplace text with an earnestness that keeps them close up to every situation, and holds them impassible and interested till the very drop of the curtain. And it is not to be questioned that clean, healthful plays of this description do a world of good. They deal so closely with fact that you cannot get away from the moral by pleading it is fiction.

The sweet little pastoral sketch of "Fanchon the Cricket," that I saw when a boy, impressed me more thoroughly regarding the temptations of life than all the dramas in imaginary or real life that I have since seen. The horrors of drunkenness as depicted in "Ten Nights in a Bar-room" have saved more brevet toppers than all the temperance lectures and blue ribbon

brigades that ever labored. The piously-upturned and angelic face of little "Eva," and the simple story of "Uncle Tom's" suffering, have done more for the cause of the oppressed than ever did the golden rule; and the honesty of purpose, and character and philanthropy of "Uncle Josh" and attendant characters teach a lesson that in our selfish life we need. And so I feel safe in advising an evening with "Uncle Josh" as equally beneficial to the ordinary religionist as a prayer-meeting. In fact, at Greeley, Col., on the way hither, a prayer-meeting was actually adjourned to see the Denman Thompson Troupe, the minister and the whole flock attending, to enjoy the performance hugely, and to go away with the satisfaction of a hundred concentrated sermons. I advise it for the young, the old, the grave and the gay, the unsophisticated and the biased. I advise it for the dyspeptic, the disappointed, to those dissatisfied with their lot, to those whose hearts are hardened and whose cords of sympathy are unstrung. I commend it to the Church, the school, the home circle, as an entertainment that no one can afford to miss, and something that will always be a pleasant remembrance and a pleasure to speak of. Especially do I entreat to an audience with the New-Hampshire farmer "every mother's son" and daughter born in old New-England, or within sight of its cloud-capped granite hills; for with this quaint old character they will live over again their early life. They will have recalled the "barn raisings," the "logging bees," the "corn huskings," and locate those "pepper and salt" pants and broad-gauge boots on many an old chap they have known whittling away and discussing the weather and the crops in the horse-shed of a country church of a Sunday afternoon. It is wonderful how perfect and realistic the picture is. It affects one with almost the force of the actual scene, and there comes at times an impulse to step up to "Josh" on the stage and greet him as an old acquaintance, and have him grab your hand and exclaim, "Well, I'm real glad to see you, by gosh!" You breathe again with him the country air, you see through the painted perspective of his stage home into the meadows of the old homestead where you carolled away your own childhood's happy days; the fields fringed with sombre stone walls, and the waving grass interspersed with the red clover blossom, and the white daisy and the golden buttercup; the cattle in the pasture beyond, and the brook beside the wood. There stand the house and the barn, and the old well-sweep, and the picture as you left it to stray away out here to the outer fringe of the continent, and mix in other scenes, and gradually forget the joys and associations of youth. But memory is a swift reminder when such a picture as "Uncle Josh" is presented, and every detail comes back so vividly that you finally sigh that the bit of realism is not reality in fact. But enough of the old farmer and his naturalness. I started in wondering why he drew such audiences, and now I wonder no longer. It is not his art—it's his artlessness.

"Nature is made better by no means,
But nature makes that mean; so o'er that art
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes."

"This is an art
Which does mend nature—change it rather—but
The art itself is nature."

And those who appreciate this are those who love "Uncle Josh"; and those who love him, love him for his homely and honest worth.

MATINEE SATURDAY.

SECURE YOUR SEATS